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How the International Rogues Greet the Immigrants

*Gullible Newcomers Easy Prey for Well Organized Band
Which Not Only Tricks Them Out of Their Own Savings
But Gathers In the Little Fortunes of the
Relatives Back Home*

A SURPRISING expose of the operations of an international ring of swindlers who prey upon immigrants newly arrived in America has just been made by Harry H. Schlacht, formerly chairman of the United States Welfare Commission at Ellis Island and now president of the Downtown Chamber of Commerce, New York. Mr. Schlacht reveals the existence of a well organized band of suave, debonair rogues, who, with affiliations reaching into almost every country in Europe from which the more prosperous immigrants come, has succeeded within the last two years in filching many millions of dollars from ignorant newcomers to America.

Mr. Schlacht's information is built upon his term as Welfare Commissioner at Ellis Island, the landing place of all immigrants who come to this harbor. He describes in detail the most successful operation of the swindlers, and discloses that they seem to have unlimited financial backing and extreme cleverness in remaining narrowly within the law.

This, the most successful swindling plan, is conducted under the guise of "international banking." The tricksters are sufficiently familiar with human psychology to know that a banker may, in the minds of the usual immigrants, include a multitude of sins. The peasant and the workman traditionally stand in awe of the man who moves in the glamour of banking association.

In New York there seems to be a little company of men who present themselves to the incoming immigrants as "international bankers." These men know that as a rule the immigrant coming to America leaves behind him a family, or at least close relatives, to whom he has promised that he will find a way to send for them. He has come believing more or less that money may be picked from bushes in the New World and that it will not be long before the wife, the mother and father, the sweetheart or the uncles and aunts may follow him. He promises faithfully to send the money "within just a little while."

He is not so greatly astonished, therefore, when immediately after his arrival and before he has learned that the bushes that grow money for the passerby to pick are planted only at the top of high hills which are hard to reach he is approached by a sleek, expensively dressed and prosperous looking "business man," who greets him with an astonishing familiarity with his name and the place of his origin and proposes a way that the family or the relatives may be brought to America at once.

The "business man," who introduces himself as a banker and who presents a neatly engraved calling card to prove his status, has found little difficulty in learning the name and former residence in Europe of the newly arrived immigrant. The records at Ellis Island gave him this information. Yet the immigrant himself is most deeply impressed by this knowledge and believes at once his caller's explanation that "his friends at home, who had learned of the banker's business in America, had written him asking him to call upon the newcomer here."

With this introduction properly staged and passed the "banker" makes an attractive proposition.

"My bank is sending to Italy," or Scandinavia, or Hungary, or France, or whatever country the immigrant has come from, "one of the members of our staff, who has been commissioned to arrange for transportation to America of the relatives of a number of your countrymen who have just arrived, like you, in New York."

"If you wish to have us undertake a similar mission for you we would be very glad to bring your father, or your mother, or your wife, or whomever you would like to have brought over, without further delay. It will not cost near as much as you anticipate if you make your arrangements at once, and we will be very glad to accept what little money you may have about you."

It is established that during the first weeks or months in America the immigrant who has come, quite often alone, is lonely for the associates he left behind. The dream of being able quickly to bring over parents, or relatives, or perhaps the wife who has promised to wait patiently until he could afford it, remains very vivid with him. He yearns for the encouragement and the accustomed society which the presence of those who were close to him at home would mean in this strange country. It is the psychological time for the broaching of any proposition which would seem to hurry the arrival of those whose presence here he most desires.

The average immigrant is as unsuspecting as a child. He has as a rule been brought up in an atmosphere of haggling barter and trade. He has learned to fight and bargain for every necessity. Funda-

mentally he is shrewd and quite often clever. But in the atmosphere of the new country, surrounded by what to him is an imposing grandeur of great buildings, prosperous people who rush to and fro, apparently always bent upon important business, and with the signs of lavishness and luxury on every hand, his suspicions of his fellow man are as a rule in abeyance for quite some time. Even as he has accepted as a fact the almost unbelievable splendor of the great New World, so he is ready to accept as true whatever is told him by any of the New World's representatives. And to him who could be a more substantial representative of the opulence around him than a "great international banker"?

The majority of immigrants come to America with quite a little hoard of savings. They amount of course as a rule to only a few dollars measured in comparison with the average New World wealth. But they are at any rate dollars, and quite often the immigrant has brought with him two or three hundred of them. But even though he has but \$50 left by the time the spurious banker reaches him, or even if he has made no new friends who will lend him more than this, the "banker" is quite satisfied.

He proposes that whatever amount it is the immigrant can produce be given to him. He promises that the "representative of his bank" will faithfully deliver the message to the relatives back home which the immigrant may give him to carry, and that he will see that whatever more money is necessary is advanced, and that the relatives—father, mother, sweetheart, or uncle or aunt—are duly brought back on the very next steamer.

Thus he procures from the unsuspecting, newly arrived immigrant a written or a verbal message to the folk at home. And of course becomes fully informed of the names, addresses and general station of these, who are waiting on the other side to be sent for by the one who came first.

Not long after a "representative" of the "banker" actually does sail for Europe. He carries with him not only the messages and the names and addresses furnished by the one immigrant mentioned above but has been similarly equipped by scores and scores of others. His sailing is a step toward the climax of a campaign extended over several weeks of preparation in this country, during which time hundreds of newly arrived immigrants have been approached by the members of the swindling band.

On the other side this representative of the rogues here one by one hunts out the relatives to whom he has been given letters and messages. Assuming that it is a mother and father, living perhaps out in the garden lands beyond Naples, whom the immigrant mentioned above wishes to have with him in America, the procedure of the representative who is visiting Italy would be:

Approaching the couple, whom he probably will find in a cottage set in the midst of a prosperous vegetable garden, he brings untold joy to them, when, hat and gloves in hand, he bows ceremoniously and announces that he has come—come especially to see them—as the agent of their Antonio, who has been so fortunate in America.

One may easily picture the awe and happiness with which Antonio's parents receive this distinguished looking visitor from the much famed America. He stands before them a spectacular symbol of the great company of rich and powerful friends whom their Antonio must already have gathered about him, in the new land. They are almost pathetically joyous to learn that Antonio has longed for them more than even they expected. The mother's eyes, perhaps, will grow quite dim when the stranger tells her how anxiously her Antonio is waiting to greet her in America with his arms held open ready to enfold her.

And no doubt the dampness will become actual tears when the visitor says: "And so I have come to take you back with me to where your Antonio is waiting." He explains that it was just for them he has come to Italy, although, of course, while he is there there are a few others whom he is taking back with him to their sons and husbands who went before. They will be company on the ship, he adds.

"Of course, there is a slight arrangement that will be necessary. Antonio has not yet been able to save a great amount of money, and what he has earned he has

preferred to spend in the preparations of a beautiful little home for himself and his mother and father. He has furnished this home very prettily indeed and has already planted a garden and built a nice shed for the cow and quite a substantial pen for the pig. So this has taken nearly all of Antonio's money, but that is easily remedied.

"You see, Antonio knew that you could easily raise sufficient money here to pay the small expense of your transportation abroad—even by selling the cottage and the garden. And that would be quite all right, since at Antonio's home there will be no need to keep possession of this property over here."

If there is any hesitancy in the minds of the old father and mother it is quickly dissipated when the visitor refers them again to the letter which Antonio had given him to give them. Antonio had expressed in this letter his happiness at thus being able to make it possible for them to join him at once. Certainly he must have meant, just as the stranger said, for them to sell the home and raise what money they could in other ways and allow this kind friend of

his to bring them on the ship that sails in just a few days.

And so the immigrant's father and mother sell the little plot of ground that has been in their family for many generations and turn the proceeds over to the representative of the "great New York bankers." They meet him a few days later at the pier, and he ushers them aboard with all the others whom he has victimized in the same way.

Instead of a "few" as company there are scores, all of whom have sold some valuable

possession, homes or jewelry, or have taken the last of their savings to furnish the stranger the money which he has told them was required for their transportation and "a few other little expenses."

None of these is ill at ease. All have had messages from America, all have been assured that homes and prosperity were awaiting them in the new and magic land.

And so the representative of the "international bankers" brings them to Ellis Island. As he comes first class, he comes with the ship to its dock and leaves it to disappear in the city. In his pockets are from \$100 to \$200 for each of the relatives he has brought over, this amount being the "few extra expenses" which he had assured his victims would be incurred.

Often the Antonios over here do not even know that their relatives are arriving. They, as a rule, are not at Ellis Island to greet them. It is not infrequent that the new arrivals are returned to Europe. Such as do find the way to communicate with those whom they expected to meet them are sadly disillusioned when they are finally brought in and learn how they had been duped.

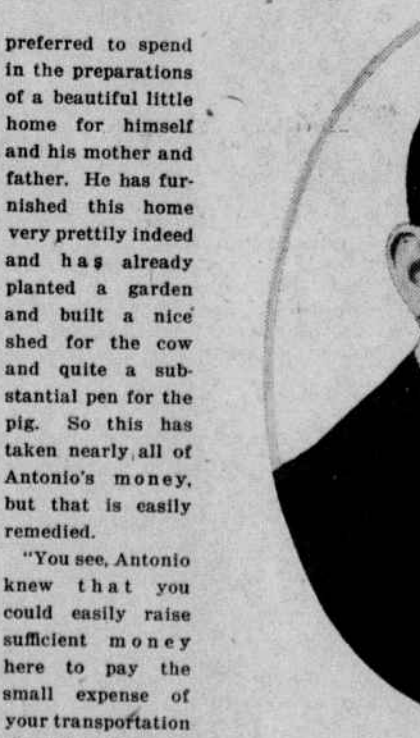
Usually the "international bankers" manage to keep within the law, or at least so surround themselves with circumstances that it is hard to convict them of the felonies they undoubtedly commit. They actually deliver the messages given them by the Antonios on this side. They actually make the trip across to the homes of the relatives abroad. They promise in return for the money raised for them on the other side nothing more than to bring the relatives to this country. Of course they ornament and elaborate this promise and deco-

orate it with many glowing verbal pictures. But they do not put these decorations down on paper and do not commit themselves before witnesses, and at any rate the unfortunates just arriving in this country do not know the methods of making formal complaints.

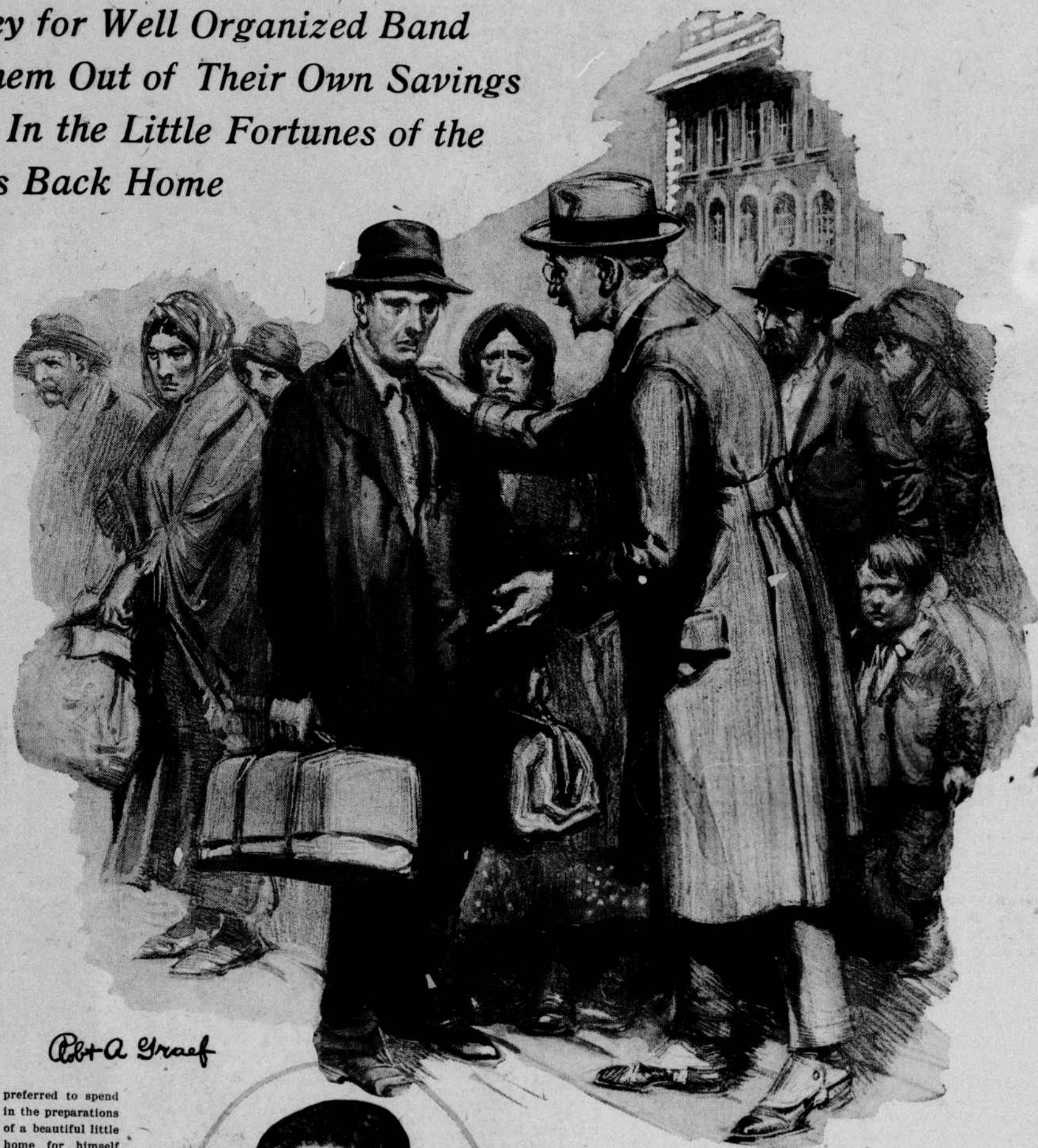
This is just one of the swindling operations Mr. Schlacht has revealed. There are many others and there are many variations of this one. Foreign language newspapers are quite often used by the "international bankers" to advertise their sending abroad a representative to "bring to this country friends of those who already have arrived." Replies to these advertisements, in which newly arrived immigrants on this side are invited to communicate with the advertiser and to trust to him whatever letters they may wish to send home, are always heavy. From among these replies names and facts are gathered with which the "bankers" can line up their prospective victims.

Consistent effort has been made to stamp out this practice. Largely these efforts already have succeeded, although the swindlers still are active. As fast as one plan is thus disclosed and action taken to protect the immigrants from it others are hatched and other schemes are worked out. Mr. Schlacht has made many recommendations for further protection of the immigrants and has enlisted the support of the Downtown Chamber of Commerce, which is now inaugurating a sturdy campaign for a more complete watchfulness over the safety and interests of all newly arrived immigrants.

Chas. A. Graef



Harry H. Schlacht, president of New York's Downtown Chamber of Commerce, who exposes the methods of the clever swindlers.



The "International Banker" is very distinguished and knows the newly arrived immigrant is already lonely in the new land.